

Stepping into a New World: Embarking on the COVID Journey

Corona has obviously affected everyone's life by now, and people may be so concerned with the present and the hopeful future that they may not reminisce about the beginning of Corona except to wishfully long for the return of the Pre-COVID days. I too have done this and wished that I could grasp those days and pull them into the present, but like a vapor they are gone. One thing that sticks out in my mind though is the way the Corona era began for me. It all began in the last few days of February 2020...

My family and I were going on a trip to The Fairmont Kea Lani in Maui Hawaii. We had been to Hawaii before, but it is so beautiful we couldn't wait to go again. It was late February, and I had barely finished my first 7-week session at Arizona State University. I actually made sure to finish early before the March 3 end of classes so we could leave on February 29th which would give us the best room rates for our 4-day trip. While we were there, we lived as normal and enjoyed relaxing and spending time together as a family. And that breakfast! Oh, I miss that awesome buffet breakfast! Waffles with brown sugar and walnuts and butter! Mmmmm! Now back to the trip. While we were there, we had no idea what was happening on the "mainland" United States (this is what the Hawaiians call the continental United States). The only thing we knew about was Super Tuesday which was broadcast on CNN on our room's TV on March 3. When our trip came to an end and as we were returning on March 4th-5th, we noticed a few people were wearing masks in the Houston airport. However, we did not think anything about it. We had boarded both our flights home without ever having to wear a mask, definitely not wash our hands and certainly not clean our disgusting pull-out seat trays, armrests, or mini TV remotes. When we arrived home on March 5th, everything was as we left it. We did notice that there was less soap on the shelves in HEB (Texas' state grocery store) but we didn't think much about it other than it was strange.

Then, the bottom fell out of the world. Starting our first full week back March 8-14 we heard that Coronavirus was becoming a big deal. President Trump was halting all foreign travel, the now ubiquitous term "social distancing" was born, and hand washing was strongly encouraged. In the very earliest days of March, leading doctors did not recommend people wear masks because they said they would not help prevent infection although some people did anyway. But the biggest shock was still to come. Typically, my family buys things we'll need for the week after our trip because it is difficult to get to the store with coming home, picking up our cats from pet boarding, and my Dad's going back to work. When we finally did go shopping on March 19th, we were greeted with unbelievable sights for American citizens: rows and rows of bear shelves. It was the most amazing and unbelievable thing I had ever seen. I took so many pictures. My mother was worried how she would find any food to make for next week's dinner because the stores were out of all our regular food. It was an astounding experience for United States citizens many of whom are not used to not being able to find food or finding very little of it. It reminded me of the way stores looked in Russia and Eastern European countries at the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, through my mother's ingenuity, we found enough to eat both by scrounging up what we could in the stores and from our pantry. But this trip was just beginning, to our bewilderment we had been plunged into a new world that was so different from the one we

had left in February only a few short weeks before. The abrupt change from carefree plenty both at home and Hawaii was the first sign to me and my family that we had embarked on a new journey: The Corona era.